

Psalms

Wisdom for Righteous Living

Lesson #8 for February 24, 2024

Scriptures: Psalm 90; 128; 141; 95:7-11; 119:1-16; John 3:16.

1. **What is the definition of *wisdom*?** How is wisdom different from knowledge?

[From the Bible study guide=BSG:] A modern dictionary defines wisdom as “the body of knowledge and principles that develops within a specified society or period.” Wisdom also relates to the “soundness of an action or decision.” We also use wisdom to mean “the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment.”—*Oxford Language Dictionary*. **Wisdom relates to knowledge, including the ability to make a wise decision.**

When we meet someone with vast knowledge in a specific area of science or literature, we call him or her “wise.” Wisdom in our common understanding today often refers to possessing expertise or knowledge in a specialized area. For some people, wisdom encompasses secret knowledge and the ability to decipher mysteries or reach a higher spiritual level.

This week, we consider what wisdom is from a biblical perspective. Our study will not only define wisdom according to Scripture but also will attempt to distill principles of wisdom for daily life. After all, what is biblical wisdom if not practical knowledge and discernment to live every day according to the precepts of Christ? The aim of our study is to grasp and apply this biblical wisdom to our lives.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 106.†§

Deuteronomy 10:12-13: ¹² “Now, people of Israel, listen to what the LORD your God demands of you: **worship the LORD and do all that he commands. Love him, serve him with all your heart,** ¹³**and obey all his laws.** I am giving them to you today for your benefit.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Deuteronomy 10:12-13). New York: American Bible Society [abbreviated as *Good News Bible*].†

2. The righteous do not just learn to love God and His ways, but they also hate evil. Why do they hate evil? Because it damages and destroys God’s children.

[BSG:] Thus, we can say that biblical wisdom is “a way of viewing and approaching life, which involved instructing the young in proper conduct and morality and answering the philosophical questions about life’s meaning.”—C. H. Bullock, “Wisdom,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, accessed on May 19, 2022 www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/bakers-evangelical-dictionary/wisdom.html—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 107.‡ [The website is listed in the Bible study guide; however, it is not listed in the Bible study guide as a hyperlink.]‡

3. So, how should wisdom affect our lives in our day? In Old Testament times, wisdom was considered to be manifested when individuals had a mature faith and followed God’s directions in their lives. There is no contradiction between having a relationship with God, called *faith*, and carrying out His deeds in our lives.

James 1:5-8: ⁵But if any of you lack wisdom, you should pray to God, who will give it to you; because God gives generously and graciously to all. ⁶But when you pray, you must believe and not doubt at all. Whoever doubts is like a wave in the sea that is driven and blown about by the wind. ⁷⁻⁸People like that, unable to make up their minds and undecided in all they do, must not think that they will receive anything from the Lord.—*Good News Bible*.*

4. What are some of the features of wisdom?

[BSG:] Biblical wisdom is chiefly recorded in the form of poetry. The books of **Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes** are the representatives of **wisdom literature in the Scriptures**. Some authors include **Song of Solomon**, too, in this grouping (though, it must be noted, its inclusion is subject to debate).

The **main themes of biblical wisdom** are **Creation, the Law, counsels for wise and mature living, the fear of God, and retribution**. The book of Proverbs is, perhaps, the best-known example of wisdom literature in the Bible; chapters 1–9 depict the great value of wisdom. When these chapters are carefully read, one observes that the concept of wisdom comprises a set of teachings for living a godly life, with advice about how to avoid the snares of unrighteousness and the wicked. From chapters 10 onward, there are more than six hundred sayings, or “proverbs”—short sentences with practical advice applicable to various situations, such as marriage, love, relationships, financial issues, political matters, children, education, et cetera, in daily life.

In contrast to the practical advice of the Proverbs, **the book of Job is more of a treatise on suffering, retribution, and vindication**. [Or, is the book of Job about God’s character and God’s wisdom?] These themes are concerned with wisdom but from God’s perspective. They unfold from the narrative of Job’s life and his troubles. This analysis is not philosophical but divine in nature. Chapter 28 is the core of the book, and it ends with the idea that reverence and obedience to God are central to wisdom: “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding’ ” (*Job 28:28, NKJV*).—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 107.†‡§ [Or, is the core of Job chapters 1&2 and 40-42 which reveal the great controversy over God’s character and government and God’s judgment of Job’s character?]+

Job 28:28: God said to human beings,

“To be wise, you must have reverence for the Lord [*sic*].

To understand, you must turn from evil.”—*Good News Bible*.*‡

5. What happens to a person when s/he leaves the way of sinners and begins choosing to follow God’s plan for his/her life? Listening to and obeying God’s plan for our lives is not a legalistic observance of some rules. It is a walk with God, an intimate relationship, a life that is full of blessings.

Psalms 119:9-16: ⁹ How can young people keep their lives pure?

By obeying your commands.

¹⁰ With all my heart I try to serve you;

keep me from disobeying your commandments.

¹¹ I keep your law in my heart,
so that I will not sin against you.
¹² I praise you, O LORD;
teach me your ways.
¹³ I will repeat aloud
all the laws you have given.
¹⁴ I delight in following your commands
more than in having great wealth.
¹⁵ I study your instructions;
I examine your teachings.
¹⁶ I take pleasure in your laws;

your commands I will not forget.—Good News Bible.*†

6. But, let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that the way of God is a way without challenges. The great controversy is still ongoing, and the Devil is alive and well. But, God recognizes that He must allow testing to let His children's faithfulness, or in some cases unfaithfulness, to be clearly revealed. Each person must be given a reasonably fair opportunity to decide on which side s/he wants to be.
7. So, the question we might want to ask is: Why are human beings attracted to sin? Is it clear that even in this life, living a godly life is beneficial?

[BSG:] The Bible depicts a daily life of faith as a pilgrimage ("walk") with God in His path of righteousness. The life of faith is maintained by walking "in the law of the LORD" (*Ps. 119:1, NKJV*) and by walking "in the light of Your countenance" (*Ps. 89:15, NKJV*). These are by no means two different walks. Walking in the light of God's countenance implies upholding God's law. Equally, walking "in the law of the LORD" involves seeking God with the whole heart (*Ps. 119:1, 2, 10*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, February 18.†§

Psalm 89:15: How happy are the people who worship you with songs,
who live in the light of your kindness!—*Good News Bible.**

[BSG:] Being "undefiled in the way" is another way the Psalms describe the righteous life (*Ps. 119:1*). "Undefiled" describes a sacrifice "without blemish" that is acceptable to God (*Exod. 12:5*). Likewise, the life of the righteous individual is a living sacrifice (*Rom. 12:1*). Thus, a love for sin must not defile it. A life devoted to God is also a "perfect way," meaning that the person assumes a right direction in life that is pleasing to God (*Ps. 101:2, 6; see also Ps. 18:32*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, February 18.†§

8. What is supposed to be our main challenge, our main work, while we are on this earth?

Romans 12:1: So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God's great mercy to us I appeal to you: **offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer.**—*Good News Bible.*†*

[BSG:] Keeping God's commandments has nothing to do with a legalistic observance of divine rules. On the contrary, it consists of "a good understanding" of the difference between right and wrong and good and evil (*Ps. 111:10; see also 1 Chron. 22:12*), and involves the whole person, not merely outward actions. Being "undefiled," keeping God's commandments and seeking God with the whole heart, are inseparable attitudes in life (*Ps. 119:1, 2*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Sunday, February 18.†§

9. It is not a sin to be tempted. Think of the story of Jesus in the wilderness and all the temptations by Satan, trying to get Him to sin. (See Matthew 4:1-11.)
10. So, what is our challenge? Why is it so difficult at times to live a godly life? Could we call this *the human predicament*?

Psalm 90:8-14: [A psalm by Moses:]

⁸ You place our sins before you,
our secret sins where you can see them....

¹⁰ Seventy years is all we have—
eighty years, if we are strong;
yet all they bring us is trouble and sorrow;
life is soon over, and we are gone....

¹² Teach us how short our life is,
so that we may become wise.

¹³ How much longer will your anger last?
Have pity, O LORD, on your servants!

¹⁴ Fill us each morning with your constant love,
so that we may sing and be glad all our life.—*Good News Bible.**

11. We need to remember constantly that God's plan was/is for us to live in a perfect environment for the rest of eternity. Do we always keep that in mind?

[BSG:] Fallen human existence is but a vapor in the light of eternity. A thousand years in God's sight is "like a watch in the night," which lasted three or four hours (*Ps. 90:4, NKJV*). Compared to divine time, a human lifetime flies away (*Ps. 90:10*). The strongest among humans are analogous to the weakest among plants (*Ps. 90:5, 6; Ps. 103:15, 16*). Yet, even that short life is filled with labor and sorrow (*Ps. 90:10*). Even secular people, who have no belief in God, mourn and lament the shortness of life, especially in contrast to the eternity that's out there and that, they know, threatens to go on without them.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, February 19.†§

12. Righteous people remember that God is our Father, Protector, Defender, and Sustainer. He is always with us.

[BSG:] God restrains His righteous wrath and extends His grace anew. The psalmist exclaims, "Who knows the power of Your anger?" (*Ps. 90:11, NKJV*), implying that no one has ever experienced the full effect of God's anger against sin, and so, there is hope for people to repent and gain wisdom for righteous living.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Monday, February 19.†§

13. God's wrath or His anger is simply His turning away in loving disappointment from those who do not want Him anyway, thus leaving them to the inevitable, deadly, and awful consequences of their own rebellious choices.

Romans 6:23: For sin pays its wage—death; but God's free gift is eternal life in union with Christ Jesus our Lord.—*Good News Bible*.*†

[EGW:] Could they [the wicked] endure the glory of God and the Lamb? No, no; years of probation were granted them, that they might form characters for heaven; but they have never trained the mind to love purity; they have never learned the language of heaven, and now it is too late. A life of rebellion against God has unfitted them for heaven. Its purity, holiness, and peace would be torture to them; the glory of God would be a consuming fire.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 542.2-543.0.†‡

14. ***When Jesus died, was that a result of the “full effect of God's anger”? Jesus died the death that sinners will die in the end caused by separation from the only source of life, God the Father. (DA 753.1-2) It is called the second death.***
15. While we certainly would recognize that it is true, we need to remember every day that our predicament is sin. It was never God's intent that we have all these problems.
16. And even though we live at this end of the history of the human race, God's promises for eternal life are still valid. (John 3:16)
17. So, God asks us to listen. What does that mean?

Psalms 81:7-8:⁷ “When you were in trouble, you called to me, and I [God] saved you. From my hiding place in the storm, I answered you. I put you to the test at the springs of Meribah.
⁸ Listen, my people, to my warning; Israel, how I wish you would listen to me!”—*Good News Bible*.*‡

18. The children of Israel in their wanderings for those 40 years in the wilderness should have learned a lesson many times that following God and His guidance was the right thing to do. Whenever they wandered away from His guidance, they ran into trouble. A good example is the experience found in Exodus 17:1-7.

Exodus 17:1-7:¹ The whole Israelite community left the desert of Sin, moving from one place to another at the command of the LORD. They made camp at Rephidim, but there was no water there to drink.² They complained to Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.”

Moses answered, “Why are you complaining? Why are you putting the LORD to the test?”

³ But the people were very thirsty and continued to complain to Moses. They said, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt? To kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?”

⁴ Moses prayed earnestly to the LORD and said, “What can I do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me.”

⁵ The LORD said to Moses, “Take some of the leaders of Israel with you, and go on ahead of the people. Take along the stick with which you struck the Nile. ⁶I will stand before you on a rock at Mount Sinai. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” Moses did so in the presence of the leaders of Israel.

⁷ The place was named Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites complained and put the LORD to the test when they asked, “Is the LORD with us or not?”—*Good News Bible*.*

19. Read Psalm 105. This psalm discusses many of the times when Abraham’s descendants were tested.

20. **Is God leading His people today into testing? What kind of testing might that be? Are we prompt in obeying God’s will?**

[EGW:] God requires prompt and unquestioning obedience of His law; but men are asleep or paralyzed by the deceptions of Satan, who suggests excuses and subterfuges, and conquers their scruples, saying as he said to Eve in the garden: “Ye shall not surely die.” Disobedience not only hardens the heart and conscience of the guilty one, but it tends to corrupt the faith of others. That which looked very wrong to them at first, gradually loses this appearance by being constantly before them, till finally they question whether it is really sin and unconsciously fall into the same error.—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 4, 146.1.‡

21. **Do you have a favorite sin? Does it become harder and harder to resist every time you commit it?**

22. Where do most of our temptations come from? Read Psalm 141. What should we pray for?

[BSG:] **Psalm 141 is a prayer for protection from temptations from within and from without.** The psalmist is not only endangered by the schemes of the wicked (*Ps. 141:9, 10*) but also is tempted to act like the wicked. The first weak point is self-control in speech, and the psalmist prays that the Lord will keep watch over the door of his lips (*Ps. 141:3*). This image alludes to the guarding of city gates that, in biblical times, protected the city.

The temptation is also whether God’s child will yield to the counsel of the righteous or be lured by the delicacies of the wicked (*Ps. 141:4, 5*). The psalmist depicts his heart as a primary threat because there the real battle happens. Only unceasing prayer of complete trust and devotion to God can save God’s child from temptation (*Ps. 141:1, 2*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, February 21.†§

James 1:12-15: ¹² Happy are those who remain faithful under trials, because when they succeed in passing such a test, they will receive as their reward the life which God has promised to those who love him. ¹³If people are tempted by such trials, they must not say, “This temptation comes from God.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, and **he [God] himself tempts no one.** ¹⁴But **people are tempted when they are drawn away and trapped by their own evil**

desires. ¹⁵Then their evil desires conceive and give birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.—*Good News Bible*.^{*†‡}

[BSG:] Psalm 141:4 depicts the progressive nature of temptation. First, the heart is inclined toward evil. Second, it practices evil deeds (the meaning in Hebrew underlines the repetitive character of the action). Third, the heart eats of the delicacies of the wicked, namely, accepts their evil practices as something desirable.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} for Wednesday, February 21.[‡]

23. But, **there are blessings that come from living righteous lives.**

Psalm 1:1-4: ¹ Happy are those

who reject the advice of evil people,
who do not follow the example of sinners
or join those who have no use for God.

² Instead, they find joy in obeying the Law of the LORD,
and they study it day and night.

³ They are like trees that grow beside a stream,
that bear fruit at the right time,
and whose leaves do not dry up.

They succeed in everything they do.

⁴ But evil people are not like this at all.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

[BSG:] Of the many blessings promised to those who revere the Lord, peace is perhaps one of the greatest. **Psalm 1 depicts the righteous by a simile of a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruits in season and whose leaf does not wither** (*Ps. 1:3; Jer. 17:7, 8; Ezek. 47:12*). This simile identifies the source of all blessings, namely, abiding in God's presence in His sanctuary and enjoying uninterrupted and loving relationship with God. Unlike the wicked, who are portrayed as chaff, with no stability, place, and future, the righteous are like a fruitful tree with roots, a place near God and eternal life.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*^{*} for Thursday, February 22.^{†§}

24. One of the exciting things we look forward to in the coming kingdom is the tree of life, standing on both sides of the river of life. But, how could one tree supply the needs of all of God children?

Ezekiel 47:12: "On each bank of the stream all kinds of trees will grow to provide food. Their leaves will never wither, and they will never stop bearing fruit. They will have fresh fruit every month, because they are watered by the stream that flows from the Temple. The trees will provide food, and their leaves will be used for healing people."—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

Revelation 22:1-2: The angel also showed me the river of the water of life, sparkling like crystal, and coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²and flowing down the middle of the city's street. On each side of the river was the tree of life, which bears fruit twelve times a year, once each month; and its leaves are for the healing of the nations.—*Good News Bible*.^{*}

25. Are there, in fact, many trees of life along that river that bear new fruit each month?
26. What kind of dwelling places will we have in heaven? And on the new earth?

Micah 4:4: Everyone will live in peace
among his own vineyards and fig trees,
and no one will make him afraid.
The LORD Almighty has promised this.—*Good News Bible*.*

Psalms 122:6-8: ⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:

“May those who love you prosper.

⁷ May there be peace inside your walls
and safety in your palaces.”

⁸ For the sake of my relatives and friends

I say to Jerusalem, “Peace be with you!”—*Good News Bible*.*

[EGW:] In the Bible the inheritance of the saved is called “a country.” Hebrews 11:14-16. There the heavenly Shepherd leads His flock to fountains of living waters. The tree of life yields its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree are for the service of the nations. There are ever-flowing streams, clear as crystal, and beside them waving trees cast their shadows upon the paths prepared for the ransomed of the Lord. There the wide-spreading plains swell into hills of beauty, and the mountains of God rear their lofty summits. On those peaceful plains, beside those living streams, God’s people, so long pilgrims and wanderers, shall find a home.—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy** 675.1.‡

Hebrews 11:14-16: ¹⁴ Those who say such things make it clear that they are looking for a country of their own. ¹⁵ They did not keep thinking about the country they had left; if they had, they would have had the chance to return. ¹⁶ Instead, it was a better country they longed for, the heavenly country. And so God is not ashamed for them to call him their God, because he has prepared a city for them.—*Good News Bible*.*

27. **The final, ultimate form of blessing for the righteous is described in Revelation 21.**

28. Could we have a guaranteed right of entrance into that wonderful existence?

[BSG:] Why is the Cross, and what happened there, the guarantee of the promises found in the New Testament of what God has in store for us? How can we get comfort from those promises even now?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, February 22.‡

29. While many Christians view the cross as the place where God paid the price for the forgiveness of our sins, there are problems with that idea. If God paid the price for my sins at the cross, is that a kind of indulgence. An indulgence is a guaranteed permission to commit a sin because that person has/had paid the price for forgiveness already! The Roman Catholic Church once offered indulgences to raise money to build St. Peter’s Cathedral in Rome. And if Christ paid the price for all sins, shouldn’t everyone be saved?

30. In fact, the life and death of Jesus give us a choice: We can live lives as close as possible to the example given us by the life of Jesus; or, we will die the awful death that He died, separated from His Father, the only Source of life.

[BSG:] In these modern times, obtaining wisdom seems not to be so desirable as achieving happiness. People would rather be happy than wise. However, can we truly be happy and live a fulfilled life without godly wisdom? The Psalms clearly say that we cannot. The good news is that we are not asked to choose between wisdom and happiness. Godly wisdom brings genuine happiness.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, February 23.‡

Psalm 1:1: Happy are those
who reject the advice of evil people,
who do not follow the example of sinners
or join those who have no use for God.—*Good News Bible.**

Psalm 119:1: Happy are those whose lives are faultless,
who live according to the law of the LORD.—*Good News Bible.**

[EGW:] Thank God for the bright pictures which He has presented to us. Let us group together the blessed assurances of His love, that we may look upon them continually: The Son of God leaving His Father's throne, clothing His divinity with humanity, that He might rescue man from the power of Satan; His triumph in our behalf, opening heaven to men, revealing to human vision the presence chamber where the Deity unveils His glory; the fallen race uplifted from the pit of ruin into which sin had plunged it, and brought again into connection with the infinite God, and having endured the divine test through faith in our Redeemer, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, and exalted to His throne—these are the pictures which God would have us contemplate.—Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ** 118.1.‡

[BSG:] How can God's Word become the source of one's delight and not merely instruction? How is feeding on God's Word related to abiding in Jesus Christ, the Word (*John 1:1; John 15:5, 7*)?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, February 23.‡§

John 1:1: In the beginning the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God.—*Good News Bible.**

John 15:5-7: ⁵ "I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me.... ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, then you will ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it."—*Good News Bible.**

[BSG:] What happens when people consciously and constantly reject God's teaching (*Psalm 81, Psalm 95*)? Why do you think that happens?—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, February 23.‡§

Psalm 81:8-14: ⁸ "Listen, my people, to my warning;
Israel, how I wish you would listen to me!
⁹ **You must never worship another god.**

**10 I am the LORD your God,
who brought you out of Egypt.**

Open your mouth, and I will feed you.

11 “But my people would not listen to me;
Israel would not obey me.

**12 So I let them go their stubborn ways
and do whatever they wanted.**

**13 How I wish my people would listen to me;
how I wish they would obey me!**

**14 I would quickly defeat their enemies
and conquer all their foes.”—Good News Bible.*†**

[BSG:] **Why can the way of the wicked sometimes appear more desirable than the counsel of the righteous (Psalm 141)? That is, how do we deal with the apparent fact that oftentimes the wicked seem to be doing very well?—Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for Friday, February 23.†§**
[See Psalm 141 above.]‡

31. In summary:

[BSG:] Biblical wisdom, as taught by the Old Testament, is an understanding of crucial salvific issues, such as our origins (Creation), the Law (the principles of God’s character in our daily life), the fear of God (a reverent love that results in joyful obedience), and retribution (the fate of the righteous and the wicked). Wisdom also is practical knowledge that prepares us to live a mature and godly life in the home, within our neighborhoods, and at the workplace. Furthermore, biblical wisdom is godly advice for living harmoniously with our spouse and children. It equips us with principles that guide our use of money and many other aspects of daily existence.—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 109-110.‡

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